

Pittsburgh RFC/mini-RFC

Not much is known about the Pittsburgh RFC. The office opened as a forecast unit in 1962 and was known as the Upper Ohio River Forecast Unit; its area of responsibility was the Ohio River and tributaries at and above Dam No. 13, McMechen, West Virginia. In 1967 the unit was upgraded to full center status and was known as a federal-state RFC with the same area of responsibility. The RFC continued to exist until 1969.

The Pittsburgh office was re-opened as a mini-RFC in 1979 and closed sometime in the late 1980's (1989?). William Drzal, current Service Hydrologist at WFO-Pittsburgh, could find no surviving documentation on the Pittsburgh mini-RFC. What follows is what he knows or has been told over the years.

It was in operation in February 1980 when I arrived at the Pittsburgh WSFO. I don't move around much! I was told that it was created in response to major flood events in the 70s (Hurricane Agnes in 1972 and Johnstown in 1977). I believe it was established by a congressional earmark.

The first and only HIC was Aldo Angelo. Aldo had previously been a hydrologist at the OHRFC. Aldo retired in 1993. Ralph Folino came to the RDO in Pittsburgh from the USACE in 1973. He served as one of the hydrologists until his retirement in 1990. Russ DeMaris also came to the mini-RFC from the OHRFC in the early 1980s. Russ became a general weather forecaster at WFO Pittsburgh when the mini-RFC closed and retired in May 2008. There was also a female hydro-tech, whose name I forget, during the early 1980s. She was replaced by Nancy Eiben who was the secretary at WSFO Pittsburgh. Nancy eventually earned enough college credits to become a hydrologist at the mini-RFC. She became the Service Hydrologist for WFO Pittsburgh during the Weather Service Reorganization in the early 1990s.

During its existence, the mini-RFC performed not only the normal RFC functions, but was also responsible for all of the duties normally associated with the Service Hydrologist at a WSFO. They did the daily data collection, ran the river model, and then issued the public river forecasts and warnings. In their spare time they also maintained the NWS gage network and coordinated with the USGS and USACE.

The biggest flood event handled by the Pittsburgh mini-RFC was the 1985 Election Day Flood on the Monongahela River. This is the flood of record on the Monongahela. During the flood, nearly 40 barges broke loose with many becoming stuck in the gates at Maxwell Locks and Dam and sinking in the locks and approaches. The river was closed to commerce for several months.